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TRAVEL IN THE TOKUGAWA ERA

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Travel in the West has followed, ever since the medieval ages, the same mode of development, a development caused directly by improved roads or indirectly by means of transport and communication. Thus the width of roads has been gradually expanded, paving splendidly improved, and traffic facilities developed until they have reached the standard known to-day. But this was not the case in Old Japan prior to the dawn of the new age ushered in by the Meiji Restoration of 1868. While remaining in almost perfect seclusion from the rest of the world for nearly three hundred years, the Japanese people developed transport systems and institutions peculiar to their country, thus holding Japanese travelling in a state of considerable inconvenience.

Since its foundation in Yedo in 1603, until its downfall in 1868, the Tokugawa Shogunate Government, adopting a stringent policy regarding communication and transport, had placed them under strict control, supervised with a rigid system. Under such circumstances, it was no wonder that travellers were required to go through many troublesome formalities prescribed by law, in addition to the difficulty of communication.

In medieval Japan, besides Kyōto, the Imperial capital, Yedo, the seat of the Tokugawa Government, and Osaka, the merchants' city, respectively formed the political and commercial centres of the country. Linking these three centres, the Shogunate Government established a new highway as the main communication line, the part between Yedo and Kyōto being called Tōkaidō or Eastern Sea Highway. To-day, the Tōkaidō railway line runs between Tōkyo (Yedo) and

Kōbe, practically along the same route as the old Tōkaidō Highway, with occasional deviations.

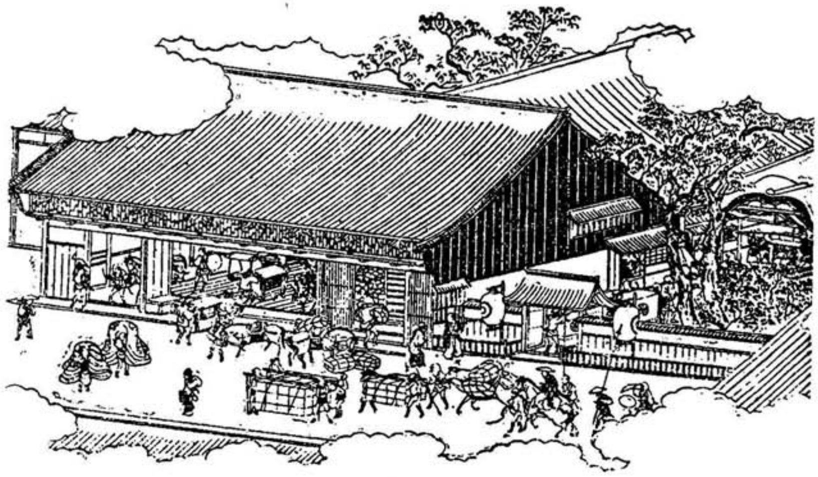
The Shogunate also designated by law four other main roads of importance, all of which were placed under the supervision of *Dōchū Bugyō* 道中奉行 or Road Magistrates. The Tōkaidō Highway was divided into fifty-three stages, starting at the Nihonbashi Bridge in Yedo and terminating at the Sanjō Bridge in Kyōto. Post-towns or posting-stations were installed at these stages, each equipped with a regular supply of men and horses. Ordinary people were able to hire men and horses at fixed rates, for carrying luggage or palanquins, from the posting-house in each post-town. There were also inns in these post-towns, of higher or lower class depending upon the rate, though the daimyo or feudal lords and high officials were lodged at specially designated hotels called *Honjin* 本陣 or Main Camps.

As a matter of fact, travel along these highways was attended with considerable difficulties, natural as well as institutional; yet it was by no means without a certain charm which travelling always affords. Most people travelled for commercial or domestic purposes in those days. There were also many pious men and women who made pilgrimages to shrines and temples, while some people visited hot-spring resorts seeking health. But these journeys generally were not the comfortable easy trips as we enjoy to-day on week-ends.

For ordinary people travelling meant a large expenditure of money and many troublesome preparations. Those who desired to travel as quickly and comfortably as possible, had to bring servants or other followers to take care of them, and occasionally hire horses or palanquins, which they had to pre-arrange through the posting-houses on the roads they intended to travel. They made this pre-arrangement by sending a subscription called *Saki-bure* 先觸れ or "a note in advance" to the posting-houses before their departure. They also had to be armed with *Tegata* 手形 or a kind of passport, which authorized their passage through the barriers, which were established for military and police reasons, at key points on the highways leading to Yedo. This passport for internal travel was usually issued by the authorities in the villages—*Nanushi* 名主 or the headmen of the villages or their family temples, as the case might be. The passport contained the bearer's name and address, the purpose of his trip, the destination, etc., which were presented to the officials of the barriers for examination. Smuggling was punished by a penalty of death. Travellers were obliged to carry luggage of considerable bulk with them, which always included flint-stones, medicines, writing materials, a rain-coat, etc. These personal belongings were packed either in *furoshiki* or a wrapping cloth, or into bundles of equal size which were carried with straps over the shoulders before and behind them. Most of them wore bamboo or sedge hats, carried canes or sticks, with their rolled-up rain-coats on their back. Carrying only a small sum of money in their pocket, they hid the rest in sack-belts worn next to the skin. A flint-stone, a portable ink and pen case, a tobacco pipe, etc., were hung from the belt. Leggings and *waraji* or straw sandals were worn as foot-gear, the latter being sold at every post-town on the way. If, however, they wanted to make their trip more comfortably, they had to carry many other things from their own homes, as they were hardly obtainable during the journey.

Well-to-do people could afford to hire palanquins when they were available, but this by no means lessened the inconvenience of the whole journey. Very often the number of men and horses installed in a post-town would fail to meet the demands of all the travellers. On such occasions, farmers in the vicinity and horses not usually used for passenger transport were often hired temporarily. Even the maintenance of post-towns sometimes depended on the fund raised from among the villages within a certain radius, if the cost of management supplied by the central government was insufficient.

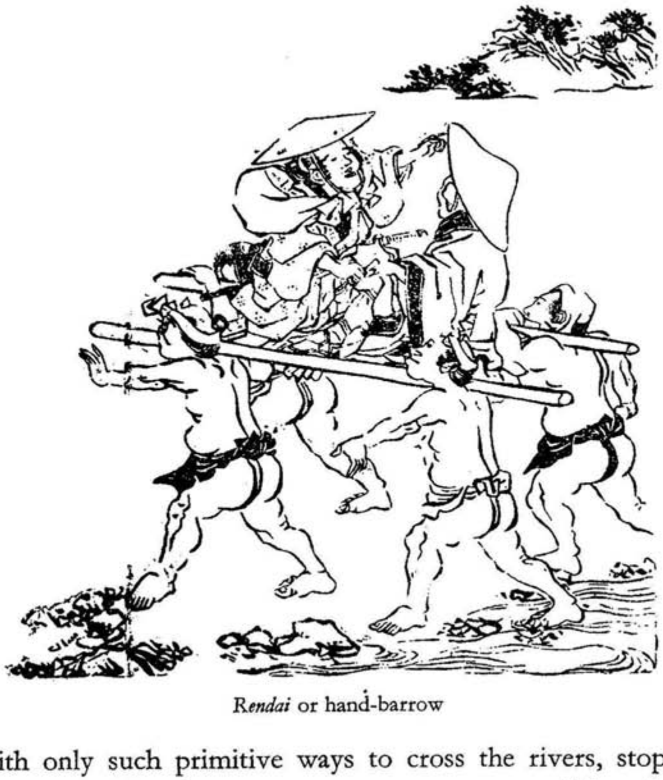
In the Tokugawa era it was the policy of the Shogunate to keep the wives of the daimyo or feudal lords as hostages in order to prevent them from rising in rebellion against the government at Yedo. Under this system, they were ordered to make periodical journeys to Yedo to attend at the Shogun's Court. In spite of prodigious expense, the daimyo were required to travel in stately processions with a regular train of followers, whose number often reached several hundreds. Moreover, there was tremendous amount of luggage to carry. It was indeed a great inconvenience for ordinary travellers to meet a daimyo's procession, since they were forced to salute him by prostrating themselves by the roadside and were strictly forbidden to raise their heads to look at the passing daimyo. Though the daimyo usually lodged at specially designated hotels, in some unavoidable circumstances they stayed at *Waki Honjin* 脇本陣, another hotel specially reserved for them. Many specimens of the *Honjin* have been preserved today. They had special gates for the daimyo's palanquins besides many other peculiar characteristics in construction. The interior was so designed as to protect the daimyo from any dangers from outside, and special rooms for their body guards, a storeroom for arms and weapons, etc. were installed in accordance with prescribed rules. The daimyo's followers were quartered separately at other inns and hotels in the post-town. All this however gave ordinary travellers much trouble.



Front view of a typical *Honjin*

On the highway the daimyo took precedence over ordinary travellers, keeping them waiting until they had crossed rivers and forbidding them to go ahead of, or past their processions.

Almost all of the large rivers on the main highways were without bridges and were either forded on foot or by ferry-boats. Where there was no such convenience, travellers were carried across by *rendai* 蓮台 or hand-barrows, or on the shoulders of coolies. In some cases, travellers were carried across the rivers in palanquins.



Rendai or hand-barrow

With only such primitive ways to cross the rivers, stoppage of traffic in time of flood was a common occurrence. When they were swollen, travellers were obliged to stay for many days at the inns on the banks until the water receded. Travellers suffered considerably from the expense for staying so long at the inns, even if the time lost were not taken into account. The wages for coolies working in the river service were fixed at regular rates. They were paid according to the weight of the travellers they carried as well as the depth of the water, which was sometimes only knee-deep, while at other times as high as the breast.

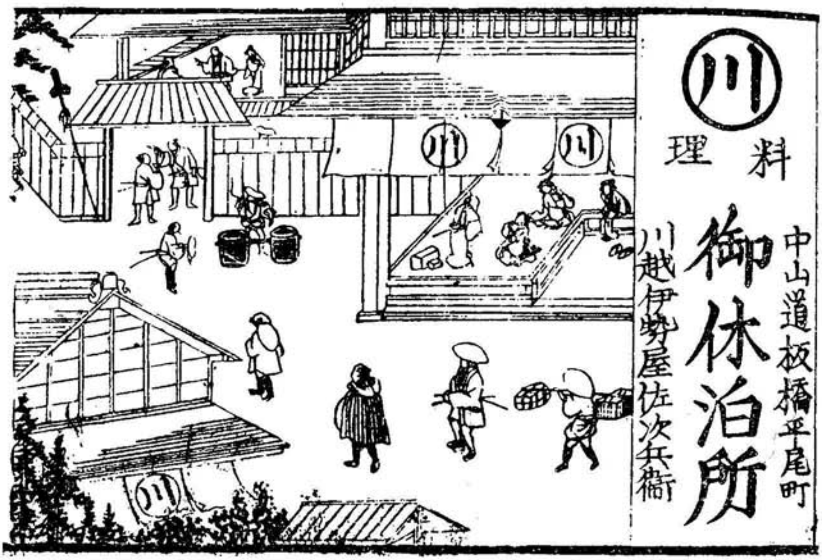
" In travelling, a kind companion ; in life, sympathy," goes an old Japanese proverb, aptly suggesting how forlorn and helpless, medieval travellers must have felt on the roads. By using our imagination, we can picture how happy the lonely traveller must have felt to travel with kind companions on the highways infested with difficulties and dangers. But some of these fellow-travellers very often turned out to be petty thieves, who robbed him of his purse containing the whole travel expenses while he was fast asleep at night at the inn. These wayside thieves were called *Goma-no-hai* ごまの蠅. Another nuisance to innocent travellers were palanquin-bearers and other coolies known as *Kumosuké* 雲助, who frequently by intimidation extorted unreasonable tips.

It was true that medieval travel was attended with these troubles and dangers ; but it was also true that travelling in those days was by no means lacking in various joys peculiar to it. Japan is both a scenic and historic country. Wherever they might be travelling, travellers in medieval Japan could fully gratify their desire for natural beauty coloured by romantic legends and ancient historical facts. To make their travels more delightful, highways were generally planted on both sides with pines and cryptomerias which formed a beautiful avenue. Halfway between every two stages along the highways lay a midway post-town, which had many resting-houses and restaurants to supply refreshments and straw sandals. However, most favoured were perhaps the travellers on the Tōkaidō Highway, because they could fully enjoy the superb beauty of Mt. Fuji as their travelling companion continuously for several days. Almost every post-town was, as recorded by many foreigners who made the trip on the Tōkaidō up to Yedo, amply equipped with amusement facilities for travellers, not excluding a group of prostitutes who formed one of its important constituents. There is, however, an abundance of travel literature and art composed by poets, literary men, painters, Buddhist priests, and others who described the beauties of Nature, sought their Muses among the wild flowers by the wayside, and grasped the mystery of life in their travels. Paradoxical as it may seem, all this should be attributed to the inconvenience of communication which forced them to travel over the country leisurely on foot or by primitive methods of conveyance. The fair sex in the medieval ages, however, experienced extreme inconvenience in travelling, owing to the Shogunate policy which placed women and people carrying arms under a very strict examination at the barriers.

Besides walking which was the principal means of travelling in those days, travels were commonly made by palanquins or on horseback. Contrary to Western countries in the same age, the use of vehicles failed, for some reason, to develop as a means of highway communication in Japan. There was also no express horse service for travellers on urgent business. Under such primitive conditions, the fastest method of travelling available was palanquins, which were carried at full speed by coolies.

Such simplicity and primitiveness of travelling, always subject to weather and other natural conditions, gave rise naturally to many superstitions. Although most of them were of Buddhistic or Shintoistic origin, excepting those relating to some popular faiths, a few had some scientific bases, just as the first-aid treatment for travellers also had. When starting on a journey, people selected an auspicious day, avoiding as far as possible to begin their travels on an unlucky day. If the string of their straw sandals should break when leaving home, it was taken as an ill omen forecasting that the intended trip would be accompanied with some ill-luck. Also, travel in an unlucky direction, which was decided by their ages, etc. was avoided. When they must go on a trip in violation of the unlucky direction, they tried to ward off the probable misfortune by starting in another direction. On the sea they chanted a certain poem as a charm against sea-sickness. As the first-aid for blisters, from which they frequently suffered, they applied a plaster of tobacco ashes kneaded with rice paste.

Historically observed, the main lines of communication in Japan have been opened chiefly for two reasons, political and commercial; but some of them owe their origin to the faith of people in certain shrines and temples, which attracted a stream of pilgrims and led to the opening of roads. In the Tokugawa age, when no vehicle was available for land transportation, large commercial cargoes from distant places were carried chiefly by water. In the Osaka district the Yodo River, Lake Biwa, etc., were utilized for such transportation, while on the Tenryū and Kiso Rivers in Central Japan, timber produced in the inner mountainous districts was carried down to the sea in floats.


川
料理
中山道板橋平尾町
御休泊所
川越伊勢屋佐次兵衛

Entrance of a post-town inn

Palanquins, the foremost means of conveyance for travellers, were carried on the shoulders of two coolies. Horses were also hired frequently by travellers to save time. When they were hired by them for their exclusive use, they rode it together with their own luggage only. Ordinarily, however, the horses were loaded with other persons' goods, being led by a pack-horse man. But usually they walked, carrying their own luggage and personal belongings.

Until stages with many inns and hotels were established on the highways, travelling was extremely difficult and uncomfortable, of which many documents in the early medieval ages can be obtained. Travellers carried dried rice, which they soaked in hot water to eat at the house where they put up for the night. The cost of the fuel required for making the hot water practically represented all of their travel expenses in those early days. It was for this reason that a cheap lodging-house or doss-house acquired the name *Kichin-yado* 木賃宿 or wood price inn, which is still in use today.

For the convenience of travelling people, the roads were provided with a small mound at distances of every *ri* (equal to 4 kilometres) called *Ichiri-zuka* 一里塚, on which was usually planted a nettle-tree. In spite of the coincidence in functions, this was entirely different in form from the milestone erected by the roadside in European countries. For the purpose of showing directions, there were at strategic points on the road a guide-stone, on which were inscribed the distance to, and direction of, the important places in the vicinity such as the temples and shrines. Besides these mounds and guide-stones, stone Buddha statues and stone pillars in various forms inscribed with a Buddhist sutra were erected at many corners of the road, giving consolation and courage to weary travellers. They may indeed be compared with the statue of Christ on the cross frequently found at the roadside in Central European countries.

Mails were usually carried with a greater rapidity than travellers, as they were speedily transported by relays by mail-carriers, who ran along the way, clad only in a loin cloth. Various other services besides the mail were rendered to travellers by posting-houses, including the hiring of palanquins, horses, and coolies, etc.

Travelling expenses for medieval travellers consisted of traffic fare, lodging charges, tips, food, and such taxes as bridge-tolls. Travellers carried this money in cash, gold, silver, or copper, in preference to paper money, because these coins were the only legal tenders which had general currency throughout the country, while paper-notes were issued with silver as convertible reserve by each feudal lord as currency exclusively within the limits of his own clan. However, in the last years of the Tokugawa period a sort of association of inns and hotels was brought into being, much to the convenience of travellers. The system adopted by this association greatly relieved travellers in general of the danger and trouble of carrying a large sum of money in cash. The members of the association mutually recommended themselves to their guests, who could enjoy warm treatment at each inn of this associations. Before going on a journey travellers could pay hotel charges during the intended trip to the headquarters of the association, and receive in return a coupon for lodging. With this coupon they could lodge at any of the member inns or hotels without paying in cash but merely asking the hotel to stamp its seal on the document.

The most remarkable of the characteristics of communication and transport in the Tokugawa era was no doubt the absence of mass conveyance. This phenomenon may be interpreted from more than one angle, but the fundamental cause was the communication policy adopted by the Shogunate with overemphasis on the safeguarding of Yedo, the seat of its government, against military attacks from outside. In accordance with this basic policy the Shogunate (1) established barriers on the highways leading to Yedo in order to place all travellers on their way to the city under a very strict examination, and (2) prohibited the construction of bridges across large rivers in order to check any rebellious armies from easily approaching Yedo. Under this system, the transport of great forces was made next to impossible. Moreover, to prevent sea transportation of troops, the Shogunate promulgated an ordinance to strictly restrict the tonnage of ships. The restriction of tonnage was also due to the Shogunate policy to keep Japanese merchants from sailing out into the open sea and engaging in illegal foreign trade.

However, this existing obstacle to free communication was but another instance of the basic policy of the Shogunate Government, which devoted all its energies to the perfection of feudalism. For self-preservation and self-prosperity, the Shogunate enfeoffed daimyo belonging to the Tokugawa family and other feudal lords loyal to it, at strategic districts in the country, while investing the remaining daimyo with fiefs of less importance. By establishing the system of *Sankin-kōtai* 參勤交代 or " attendance by turns at the Shogun's Court ", the Shogunate ordered the daimyo or feudal lords to make periodical journeys to Yedo, which served to weaken them financially to a considerable extent. Moreover, in order to prevent them from revolting, the Shogunate made it compulsory for them to leave their wives in Yedo as hostages. All the medieval systems and institutions were thus established and operated solely in the interests of the Tokugawas. No wonder that communication and transport were no exception to this general rule.

It was a strange fact that vehicles were never used for long journeys in medieval Japan, although they were sometimes utilized for carrying heavy loads for short distances in towns and cities. Practically, however, there was no chance for vehicles to fully function as a means of traffic in those days, since the roads and highways were in such poor condition as to be unsuitable for vehicle travel. In early medieval Japan, courtiers, noblemen and ladies used to ride about the streets of Kyōto, the Imperial capital, on ox-carts ; but with this one exception, vehicles had never been used as a means of conveyance until the modern age. In the Yedo period, heavy cargoes came to be commonly transported short distances by ox-carts, and *rickshaw* were invented for passenger use in the early years of Meiji. The fact that vehicles never played an important part in the history of this country's communication and transport until their introduction in the Meiji era, is in a striking contrast to the West.

For us who share today in the benefits of highly developed communication, it is hardly imaginable that travelling in this country should have lingered in such a backward stage of development until only a hundred years ago. There are many colour-prints, notably by the famous master Hiroshige, which depict various highway scenes, showing the difficult conditions of travel and the idyllic atmosphere of the roadside. Some itinerant poets such as Bashō 芭蕉, the greatest master of Haiku, sought their Muses in the mountains and at the seaside, often realizing the truth of life during the journey; while many itinerant priests were convinced that they could attain Buddhahood by travelling. It was also the common custom for young *samurai* to make a tour of the country with an object of securing training in the martial arts from the many famous masters in various parts of the country. All this goes to suggest that something which has been lost today under our highly developed communication system was realized by primitve travelling in those days. Considered in this light, it may be said in conclusion that the study of medieval travel in this country is not only full of significance from a scientific standpoint, but is also fascinating for its wealth of legends and stories of customs of that day.